Teacher Education and Academic Quality in the Nigeria Education System: A Vicious Circle Perspective

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Abstract

Education is often seen as a tool for quality manpower development but there cannot be the required manpower without academically qualified teachers, vis-à-vis quality teacher education. This brings to fore the importance of teacher education and the academic quality of entrants into the colleges of education. This paper examined the concept of quality teacher education in Nigeria education system. Teacher education as the hub in the wheel of faculties, as discussed, reflecting the interaction of poor quality teachers with the entire education system. Also, the vicious circle was adapted to demonstrate the quality of teachers produced in Nigeria colleges of education. The study, therefore, concludes that low quality of Nigeria education system has its root in the poor quality of teacher trainees admitted into the colleges of education. Recommendations were made that the teaching profession be properly professionalised and practitioners well remunerated and motivated so as to improve the prestige of teaching profession. Also, educational planners should evolve new strategies to ensure that policies concerning training of teachers are restructured, most especially admission requirements, to be able to attract quality students into colleges of education.
Introduction

Teacher education is the form of education given as pre-training or post-training to would-be and on the job teachers. It encompasses holistic perspective in giving the best to the people saddled with the responsibility of inculcating societal values, norms and academic start up so as to produce world class citizens. There are values expected of a trained teacher and these values are given or added only in nationally recognised teacher training institutions.

As prescribed by the National Policy on Education in Nigeria, it is expected that all teachers in educational institutions be professionally trained and that the following institutions among others shall give the required professional training provided they continuously meet the required minimum standards:

a. Colleges of education;
b. Faculties of education;
c. Institutes of education;
d. National teachers institute;
e. Schools of education in the polytechnics;
f. National Institute for Nigerian languages (NINLAN);

No matter the institution attended, the bottom line is that teaching manpower must be produced in quantity and in quality. As the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) document (2004:35) noted, "the goals of wealth creation, employment generation, poverty reduction and value reorientation can be effectively pursued, attained and sustained only through an efficient, relevant and functional educational system" (Ibidapo-Obe, 2007). A functional educational system can only be built on a solid foundation, featuring qualitative values which are supposed to be the stock-in-trade of quality teachers.

With a bias for quality, often times, quality in education is measured by the academic output of a given level of education and that performance of teachers are equally measured using the academic performance of their students among several other variables. In a way therefore, what constitutes competence in teaching is intimately connected with the type of teacher education training available for preparing would-be school teachers. One of the major problems of teacher education is the poor quality of the teachers produced from the teacher training colleges (Taiwo, 1982). Akinbote (2000) has attributed the poor quality of products of colleges of education among other things to the quality of students admitted into the colleges. He was of the opinion that the lowering of the admission requirements for whatever reasons has not only affected the quality of the products
of the colleges but also the image and prestige of the teaching profession. This implies that the teachers are the hub in the act of imparting knowledge at any given level in the educational system and that their quality determines the quality of the students.

In recent times, there has been lamentation from different stakeholders in the education sector of the fallen standard of education; in particular, the poor performance of secondary school students in externally conducted examinations (WAEC and NECO). This poor performance, not minding the yardstick used, had presented a trend in failure such that it has captured the attention of every stakeholder. Then, if the crop of our future generation continues to perform poorly at least as measured at the secondary school level which is a prerequisite to higher education, what does the future hold for us as a nation? It has become a great challenge to teachers at the colleges of education that often times, students cannot communicate effectively, let alone being able to understand what the lecturers are teaching them. This phenomenon has its roots in the flawed academic foundations of the students.

In systems theory, it is a trite that input determines the output. This simply means that the quality of the input determines to a great extent the quality of the output, not minding the value added at the process phase. As such, if the output is poor, then we should look at the quality of the input. The saying that 'what goes around comes around' has no established place than in the teacher education as practised in Nigeria.

The focus of this paper is on the quality of teachers produced at the colleges of education as determined by the quality of the students (input) admitted into the colleges of education as it robs of its different levels in Nigeria educational system. This is with an attempt to proffering solution to a situational problem that can be resolved with the understanding of the trend in our educational system as being in a vicious circle.

The Goals of Teacher Education

Teacher education as the anchor of the education system is clearly stated in the provision of the National Policy on Education that no education system can rise above the quality of its teachers and that the minimum qualification for entry into the teaching profession shall be the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE). The goals of teacher education shall be to:

a. produce highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom teachers for all levels of our educational system;

b. encourage further the spirit of enquiry and creativity in teachers;
c. help teachers to fit into social life of the community and the society at large and enhance their commitment to the national goals;
d. provide teachers with the intellectual and professional background adequate for their assignments and make them adaptable to changing situations; and
e. enhance teachers' commitment to the teaching profession (FGN, 2004).

As promising as this goals are, it is the prerogative of the teacher training institutions to ensure that they are met. The achievement of these goals can only be measured in the quality of the teachers trained. As identified by different scholars on the issue of teacher education, variants of factors are responsible for the poor quality of the practitioners of this noble profession. Among these factors is the poor quality of entrants into the colleges of education.

Quality Teacher Education in Nigeria Education System

In educational planning, two forms of system analysis are done. They are qualitative and quantitative system analyses (Fabunmi, 2005). Since the focus of this paper is on quality, the qualitative system analysis will be considered. Fabunmi (2005) defined qualitative system analysis as an in-depth reflection or consideration of the aims and objectives of education and the extent to which the education system meets up the stated aims and objectives in the national policy on education.

This is a pointer to the fact that quality at the primary, secondary and teacher education levels must be measured in relation to the stated aims and objectives in the National Policy on Education. According the general objectives of teacher education is the production of highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom teachers for all levels of our educational system (FGN, 2004). However, a major challenge for the educational system in contemporary Nigeria is the production of qualified teachers to teach at various levels of the educational system in sufficient numbers (Ibidapo-Obe, 2007).

This implies the fact that not only is the quality of teachers at all levels important but that training at the various institutions, most especially colleges of education, must also be given serious reconsideration. This is in the light of the entry quality of the teacher trainees as dictated by different stakeholders, most especially the regulators. Since quality of the input determines the quality of the output, then our searchlight must be on the admission quality of the trainees. Quality refers to the standard of a phenomenon when it is compared to other things like it. How good or bad something is, that is, to be of good/poor/top quality or of a high standard (Oladipo, Adeosun & Oni, 2009).

Oderinde (2004) identified two aspects of quality in education, which are internal and external. The internal quality is the implementations of the school objectives while the external quality deals with the implementation of national
objectives which are prerequisites to the achievement of quality in any educational institution. Asaaju (2010) and Okereke (2007) described quality education as the education which provides learners ample opportunity for the acquisition of skills, experiences and understanding required to assist the teacher to cope with the society and life in general.

The quality of education in any country is reflected by and related to the quality of the men and women who serve as teachers in its school systems (Adesina, 2005). Teacher education quality is described as the rating of the academic quality and values given to in-training and on the job teachers by the approved institutions responsible for the training of teachers in the education system.

Asaaju (2010) and Ajeyalemi & Ejiogu (1987) were of the opinion that the products of any educational system cannot be higher than the quality of the teachers charged with the responsibility of facilitating learning among those who get exposed to that system at its various levels. The idea and reasoning of the teacher being the hub of the educational system are such that have made the teacher education so important and relevant that the quality at this level determines the quality of the education system as a whole. Its influence transcends all spheres of the national economy.

Teacher Education as the Hub in the Wheel of Faculties

Explaining this phenomenon, using the 'wheel of faculties' to explain the importance and influence of teacher education as the hub of the education system, fourteen faculties (14) in Nigeria Universities were identified. Since all departments belong to one faculty or the other, offering variants of courses needed for the training of high level manpower, they were built into a wheel. The wheel has as its hub the teacher education. Simply put, the quality of the teachers rubs off on the students either good or bad, right from the primary school level to secondary school level through to the tertiary level. It is the quality inherited from one level that is fed into the other. As the wheel spins, teachers build on the existing academic quality of the students who are sent into the various departments/faculties to be schooled. It is this crop of graduates that gives a feedback reflective of the quality in the education system. No wonder, Ezeife, a former governor of Anambra State, once said that "the disturbing reduction in the quality of education and low standard of graduates from the nation's universities should not be allowed to continue; signifying that the nation was depreciating rather than developing" (The punch newspaper, 27th November, 2009).
Figure 1: Wheel of Faculties

The Vicious Circle

Colleges of Education are forced to accept academically weak students

Academically weak students

Complaints about standards

Low quality teachers

Figure 2: The Vicious Circle
Adapted from Rogers Porkess (2006) Unwinding the Vicious Circle. Loughborough
Four groups of people involved in the vicious circle are the:

a. students;
b. teachers in schools;
c. colleges lecturers; and
d. regulators.

The Students

The students are the learners right from the primary schools through the secondary schools to the colleges of education. It is often expected that when the educational foundation of any student (i.e. at the primary level) is faulty, then this will be carried forward into the secondary school level. More so, the position of the national policy on education stated that "everything possible shall be done to discourage the incidence of dropping out at the primary level of education" (FGN, 2004). The importance of the primary level of education is such that "the rest of the education system is built upon it and that it is the key to the success or failure of the whole system" (NPE, 2004). This implies that the academic quality of students at this level is the input into other levels of education and that it will determine, to a great extent, the output of other levels in the education system.

Secondary schools at the junior level "provide all primary school leavers with the opportunity for education of a higher level" and "it shall be tuition free, universal and compulsory" (FGN, 2004). This simply means that all the primary school leavers are absorbed into this level, not minding their academic quality. This set of students, most of whom will "complete junior secondary school, shall be streamed into the senior secondary school" and "the streaming shall be based on the result of tests to determine academic ability" (FGN, 2004). In reality, majority of them will make it into the senior secondary school and those that could not will be for reasons that might not be connected with academics.

The senior secondary school level actually evaluates student's academic ability in pursuance of tertiary education. This level has become about the most talked about in recent times. This is primarily because it is the first level of education where certification is based on continuous assessment and a national examination and that there has continued to be mass failure in a trendy pattern. It also determines which higher institution to go (university, polytechnic or college of education) and what course of study to be offered among other reasons.
Teachers are expected to be professionally trained, "since no education system may rise above the quality of its teachers". "The minimum qualification for entry into the teaching profession shall be the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE)" (FGN, 2004). In the course of this paper, reference is made to teachers trained in colleges of education. Since the teachers holding NCE are the products of the colleges of education, their quality, whatsoever it is, is their credential for teaching the students at any level of education they might find themselves. This means that it is what they have in quality that they will give to the students, since the quality of the teacher dictates the quality of the students.

Colleges Lecturers

In the vicious circle because they directly interact with the students and know there academic abilities, they tend to do more of complaining about the standard and do all possible within the ambit of their official positions to teach students that are ready to learn.

Regulators

Each group knew about its own world but not enough people, it would seem, had an overview of the whole situation. This was particularly true of the regulators. They are the politicians and the civil servants who advise them and it is they who make the rules. It is their collective responsibility to be aware of the complete picture (Rogers, 2006). The regulators are basically the policy formulators. They present and interpret the position of government. It is whatever they say that matters. The National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) is the regulatory body for colleges of education in Nigeria and they have been championing the course of ensuring quality of teacher education by the various review of the system. The area that comes to mind for the purpose of this paper is in the admission requirements into the colleges of education as it borders on the quality of students admitted.

The colleges of education are for the training of middle level manpower in teacher education. Candidates are trained for three years after senior secondary school education for the award of the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE). Graduates of the colleges of education can teach at the primary, junior or senior secondary school levels (Ibidapo-Obe, 2007). The colleges of education saddled with the responsibility of producing quality teachers have been placed in the third fiddle in tertiary education level by the various regulatory agencies. This is obvious in the admission requirements and placement by the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTM) that has made the colleges of education the dumping ground for low quality students.
Explaining the vicious circle

There are four components of the spin
(1) Weaker students forced on colleges of education
(2) Complaints about standard
(3) Low quality teachers produced
(4) Academically weak students produced

_Weaker Students Forced on Colleges of Education_

It has been noted that there has been a decline in the quality of candidates admitted into the universities as a result of the combination of poor quality output from the secondary level (also believed to be inherited from the primary level) (Ibidapo-Obe, 2007).

The vicious circle has its input as the academically weak students that have been forced on the colleges of education. They are the students that scored low marks of about 180 points all over 400 and have about four (4) to five (5) credit passes in the Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE).

Although, there is another part of the students that had to gain admission into the colleges of education through prelim programme, they are the students that do not meet the UTME requirements. This simply means that they are of lower quality than those that at least met the UTME requirement. Akinbote (2007) ascertained that only 24% of the student teachers in the colleges of education met the five (5) credits at a sitting including English Language requirement. Similarly, majority of the students in the colleges have between 3-4 SSCE/GCE O/L papers or equivalents. Next to this category are those with between one (1) and three (3) papers while those with five (5) credits and above are the lowest. The category of students with at least five (5) credits at a sitting, including English Language are judged as good products and 'good enough' for admission into the colleges of education. He further stated the reasons why students enroll in colleges of education to be: there were no other institutions that could offer then, admission and to use the college as a stepping stone and personal desire to enroll. In all, the last reason represents the smallest part of the three.

This is a typical picture of the class of students that serve as input into the colleges of education. This is due to variants of factors among which are need to produce more manpower for the ever expanding primary and secondary education, the importance of higher education for poverty eradication and the annual inability of universities to accommodate the large turnout of admission seekers among others.
Complaints about Standard

At the colleges of education, lecturers are faced with the reality of the quality of students they have to teach; most times, the population and the lecture room constraints are such that do not give room for good teaching-learning relationship. Alld as such, complaints of the poor academic quality of the students admitted coupled with other factors become the concern of the lecturers.

Low Quality Teachers Produced

The lecturers and the system having done their own part, after the expiration of the three years NCE programme, produce low quality teachers, since input determines the output. These crops of teachers are produced en masse and since they are the ones available to teach, they are absorbed into either the pre-primary, primary or secondary levels of education. Armed with their low quality academic knowledge, supported by the saying that you cannot give what you do not have, they give what they know to the students. This doing automatically makes them add low quality performance to the education system, thereby helping to turn out academically weak students. These academically weak students must be placed anyhow in the educational system and as such, they end up finding their ways into the colleges of education, since there is provision for them at this level.

Academically Weak Students Produced

To produce academically weak students is not difficult. It is just a matter of getting a low quality teacher to teach the students. Most times, the issue of quality should not be looked at from the angle of a particular level in the education system. Since education sector is a system, one sub-system has about direct relationship with the others and as such, low quality in one affects and reflects in the others.

The Monitoring of Learning Achievement (MLA) study in Nigeria gives considerable insight into the quality of outputs, especially at the lower level of education in Nigeria. The result of the study indicates that an average public primary school child in Nigeria can neither read, write nor calculate properly (Oladipo et al 2009). This means that the mass failure experienced in recent times at the nationally conducted examinations in secondary level is a reflection of variant foundational faults at the primary level.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The issue of low quality in Nigeria education system need not be judged on the face value, it has its root in the poor quality of teacher trainees admitted into the colleges of education. As identified, teachers produced with poor academic
background themselves become low quality products; thereby giving the low
goodness back to students they are exposed to and by so doing presents a vicious
circle. This negative influence does not stop at the colleges; it permeates the
universities, thereby producing low quality high and middle level manpower for
the nation. This scenario has prevented the education system from achieving the
aims and objectives expected of it. Sincerely, no magic can be done by anybody
until quality students become the inputs at the colleges of education.

It is, therefore, recommended that educational planners should evolve new
strategies to ensure that policies concerning training of teachers are restructured,
most especially admission requirements, to be able to attract quality students into
colleges of education.

Governments should introduce incentives that would make education courses
interesting to would-be teachers, such as special allowances to student teachers.
The teaching profession should be properly professionalised and practitioners
well remunerated and motivated so as to improve the prestige of teaching
profession.

More effort should be put into continual retraining of teachers to ensure
improvement in standard. Also, self development among teachers should be
encouraged since government alone cannot do it all.

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